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ABSTRACT

A survey assessed attitude and background differences of limited-English-speaking Southeast Asian refugee students and mainstream non-Asian students at Lincoln High School in Stockton, California. The survey was given to 256 English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) students in spring 1988 and 171 ESL students in spring 1989, and concurrently to a random sample of mainstream students--106 in 1988 and 94 in 1989. Bilingual aides were available to help ESL students interpret the survey. The instrument consisted of 30 forced-choice (yes/no) statements assessing attitudes, self-concept, family background, and school-related issues. Male and female responses are reported separately in some areas where differences were noted. Two final subjective questions asked students to indicate the school's biggest asset and biggest problem. The results are reported in tabular form with narrative analysis. (Author/MSE)

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CROSS CULTURAL ATTITUDE SURVEY

School Years Ending 1988 and 1989

Lincoln High School, Stockton, California

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June, 1989

Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the California Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (Long Beach, CA, April 20-23, 1989).

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The purpose of this survey is to assess attitude and background differences between ESL Southeast Asian refugee students and non-Southeast Asian mainstream students at Lincoln High School.

The survey was given to 256 ESL (English-as-a-Second-Language) students in the Spring, 1988, and 171 ESL students in the Spring, 1989. Surveys were concurrently administered to a random sample of mainstream students - 106 in 1988 and 94 in 1989. All surveys were completed in English classes at Lincoln High School. Bilingual aides were available in low-level ESL classes to assist students who needed help interpreting the information.

The survey was composed of 30 forced-choice (yes/no) statements. Statements assessed attitudes, self-concept, home background and school-related issues. Male and female responses are reported separately in some areas when responses differed between males and females.

Two subjective questions followed the survey and asked students to write the biggest asset at Lincoln High School and also the biggest problem at Lincoln High School.

This report summarizes response differences between Southeast Asian refugees and native-born, non-Asian students at Lincoln High School for both years.

The following abbreviations are used for column headings:

SEA - Southeast Asian refugees
NBS - Native-Born Students
/M - Male
/F - Female

ETHNIC PROFILE OF STUDENTS

ESL Students	1988	1989
Cambodian Males	116	66
Cambodian Females	83	53
Vietnamese Males	31	27
Vietnamese Females	16	20
Lao/Hmong Males	3	4
Lao/Hmong Females	9	1
	256	171

Native-Born Students	1988	1989
White Males	33	32
White Females	39	33
Black Males	5	6
Black Females	8	5
Hispanic Males	7	7
Hispanic Females	14	11
	106	94

SURVEY RESULTS

Home Background/Jobs	Percent of "Yes" Responses SEA 1988	SEA 1989	NBS 1988	NBS 1989
I am happy with my home life.	.76	.71	.83	.85
I have my own bedroom.	.19	.20	.86	.90
I have a quiet place to study at home.	.59	.57	.86	.92
My family usually eats together as a group.	.82	.75	.56	.48
I have home responsibilities like taking care of younger children, cleaning, etc.	.92	.88	.50	.46
I have a part-time job after school.	.21	.18	.48	.71
I would like to find a part-time job after school.	.90	.94	.58	.42
School/Safety				
I like school.	.88	.91	.64	.75
I like to eat in the school cafeteria.	.86	.50	.36	.15
I have enough time to do my homework.	.58	.60	.82	.76
I am afraid for my safety at school.	.49	.40	.12	.08
I am afraid for my safety outside of school.	.56	.54	.24	.44

	Percent of "Yes" Responses			
	SEA/M 1988	SEA/M 1989	SEA/F 1988	SEA/F 1989
I do well in P.E./Sports.	.87	.71	.35	.54
	NBS/M 1988	NBS/M 1989	NBS/F 1988	NBS/F 1989
I do well in P.E./Sports.	.93	.89	.73	.87

	Percent of "Yes" Responses			
	SEA 1988	SEA 1989	NBS 1988	NBS 1989
Self-Concept/Personal/Racial				
I like the way I look.	.74	.67	.88	.86
I am happy about my future.	.70	.73	.84	.90
I feel I am as smart as most students.	.43	.48	.84	.85
If I have a problem, I talk to my teacher about it.	.63	.54	.27	.15
If I have a problem, I talk to my counselor about it.	.54	.56	.27	.20
If I have a problem, I talk to my friends about it.	.60	.62	.78	.79
If I have a problem, I talk to no one about it.	.43	.38	.31	.22
I get along well with other students.	.80	.78	.89	.87
I enjoy getting to know a variety of different people.	.88	.86	.61	.69
I am called racial names at school.	.56	.47	.12	.10

	Percent of "Yes" Responses			
	SEA/M 1988	SEA/M 1989	SEA/F 1988	SEA/F 1989
I have an American friend at school.	.40	.52	.24	.50
I have visited an American home.	.28	.28	.20	.24
	NBS/M 1988	NBS/M 1989	NBS/F 1988	NBS/F 1989
I have a Southeast Asian friend at school.	.44	.50	.20	.32
I have invited a Southeast Asian home.	.11	.10	.04	.09

SUBJECTIVE QUESTIONS:

What is the biggest asset at Lincoln High School?

Southeast Asian students: in both years, about 60% of the students felt that teachers and/or quality of education were the biggest assets at Lincoln High School. Other assets mentioned frequently were the Multilingual Center, beauty of the campus, and friends.

Mainstream students: Fifty percent in 1988 and 65% in 1989 felt that school spirit and the sports programs were Lincoln's biggest assets. Other assets mentioned: having an open campus and friends.

What is the biggest problem at Lincoln High School?

Southeast Asian students: About 70% in 1988 and 60% in 1989 felt racial slurs and conflicts were the biggest problems at Lincoln. Other problems mentioned were no men's volleyball team and no intramural sports program.

Mainstream students: In 1988, about 50% of the students complained about the short school lunch time and the crowded conditions in the cafeteria. In 1989, almost 50% mentioned the drug problem and 25% complained about clicks and social isolation. Other comments were individual in nature.

SUMMARY OF RESPONSES

Comparison Between Southeast Asian and Native-Born Students:

Many differences between Southeast Asian and native-born students are evident. Generally, native-born students have their own bedrooms and have a quiet place to study. Most American students said they have a part-time job and less than half said they have routine home responsibilities. About half of the native-born students responded that they eat together for family meals.

Only a fifth of the refugee students said they have their own bedroom, and most of these students were Vietnamese females. Few Southeast Asian students have part-time jobs, but over 90% said they would like to have a job. All of the Southeast Asian females said they have routine home responsibilities, and most of the Southeast Asian males responded likewise.

According to the survey, native-born and Southeast Asian students handle problems differently. American students tend to talk to their friends about problems. They generally do not share problems with teachers or counselors. Southeast Asian students may talk to teachers, counselors, or friends. But over a third of the Asian students said they keep their problems to themselves and talk to no one.

Native-born students seem to have a more positive self-concept than Southeast Asian students. When compared to the refugee students, a significantly higher percentage of native students said they like the way they look, feel as smart as other students, do well in P.E./sports, and are happy about their future.

About half of the Southeast Asian students reported being called racial names at school, while only 10% of the native students face racial name-calling. The sample of non-Southeast Asian racial minorities is small and therefore may not properly represent the total school population; but from the sample taken, Southeast Asians encounter racial prejudice more frequently than other racial groups. Southeast Asians experience name-calling more than twice as often as Blacks and three times as often as mainstream Hispanic students.

Comparison Between 1988 and 1989 Responses

The purpose of comparing information for two years is to give credibility to the responses and also to see if major attitude changes occurred in the Lincoln High School population.

Between 1988 and 1989, the Title VII staff at Lincoln tried to strengthen support services to ESL/refugee students and their families. Title VII staff also conducted several "cultural awareness" sessions in mainstream classes and continued with the racial conflict management program. In addition, Title VII staff initiated a cultural exchange program between mainstream and ESL students, and "paired" two mainstream English classes with two ESL classes. Hopefully, these programs have had a positive affect on the overall student population at Lincoln.

Except for a 50% increase in part-time employment for native-born students, few changes occurred in family backgrounds between 1988 and 1989. Significant differences did occur in the areas of P.E., intercultural friendships, and the feeling of safety.

According to the survey results, fewer students in all ethnic groups like to eat in the cafeteria. Native-born students reported a decrease in sharing problems with teachers or counselors, although more reported that they like school generally. Females in both ethnic groups reported feeling more positive about their ability in P.E. - a 50% increase among Southeast Asian females. More students generally feel they have cross-cultural friends - a 50% increase among refugee females. Students generally reported feeling safer at school, but feeling unsafe outside of school almost doubled among native-born students in 1989.

Although more than half of the Southeast Asian students continue to feel that Lincoln's biggest problem is racial name-calling and fighting, there was a 30% decrease in the number of ESL students who reported this as a problem. Among mainstream students, 30% more students reported drugs as a problem when compared to last year.

CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

Lincoln High School has made progress since 1979 when the first Southeast Asian refugees enrolled. Assimilating a culturally, socially, and economically different population into a long-established native population is not easy.

Staff should be aware that home conditions make success in school more difficult for ESL students. Refugee students live in close-knit family situations and generally do not have their own bedrooms. In many homes finding a quiet place to study is difficult. Most ESL students are supported by welfare, and role models in high-level jobs are non-existent. Unlike their American classmates, ESL students usually do not have English-proficient parents who can help them with homework.

Some ESL students fled their country without parents. Some parents (especially fathers) were killed during the many years of war. Dealing with post-tramatic stress is usually not an issue in American students' homes, but is a daily reality in many Southeast Asian homes.

Helping to assimilate immigrant/refugee students at Lincoln High School is as important for the native population as for the new students. Everyone loses if we permit social isolation. We have a responsibility to facilitate assimilation and not assume a "sink-or-swim" philosophy. Even after ESL students are mainstreamed, most immigrant students have special needs. Understanding immigrant students' backgrounds and continuing to provide positive interaction with the dominant culture is needed.

School is the primary means for the ESL students to learn American culture. Being accepted by their American peers will help to form positive new identities. Living in an indifferent or hostile environment will make assimilation difficult. Prejudice will teach all students that intolerance is acceptable in our society.

This survey summarizes responses from most of the ESL students at Lincoln High School and from a random sample of the native-born student population. Each student is an individual and making generalizations through statistical information can sometimes be misleading. However, comparisons between these major student groups may help us to better understand some of the differences in attitudes between our students and to work together to better integrate our new cultural diversity.